

and annoyance about perceived encroachment of religions considered "non-traditional." But in the Republic of Georgia organized mob violence against those of nontraditional faiths has escalated, largely directed against Jehovah's Witnesses. For over 2 years, a wave of mob attacks has been unleashed on members of this and other minority religious communities, and it is very disturbing that the police have consistently either refused to restrain the attackers or actually participated in the violence.

Since October 1999, nearly 80 attacks against Jehovah's Witnesses have taken place, most led by a defrocked Georgian Orthodox priest, Vasili Mkalavishvili. These violent acts have gone unpunished, despite the filing of over 600 criminal complaints. Reports cite people being dragged by their hair and then summarily punched, kicked and clubbed, as well as buses being stopped and attacked. The priest leading these barbaric actions has been quoted as saying Jehovah's Witnesses "should be shot, we must annihilate them." Considering the well-documented frenzy of these depredations, it is only a matter of time before the assaults end in someone's death.

Other minority religious communities have not escaped unscathed, but have also been targeted. Mkalavishvili coordinated an attack against a Pentecostal church last year during choir practice. His truncheon-wielding mob seriously injured 12 church members. Two days before Christmas 2001, over 100 of his militants raided an Evangelical church service, clubbing members and stealing property. In February of this year, Mkalavishvili brought three buses of people, approximately 150 followers, to burn Bibles and religious materials owned by the Baptist Union.

Mkalavishvili brazenly holds impromptu press conferences with media outlets, often as the violence transpires in the background. With his hooligans perpetrating violent acts under the guise of religious piety, camera crews set up and document everything for the local news. The absence of a conviction and subsequent imprisonment of Mkalavishvili is not for lack of evidence.

After considerable delay, the Georgian Government did commence on January 25 legal proceedings for two mob attacks. However, considering the minor charges being brought and the poor handling of the case, I fear Mkalavishvili and other extremists will only be encouraged to continue their attacks, confident of impunity from prosecution.

Since the initial hearing in January of this year, postponement of the case has occurred four times due to Mkalavishvili's mob, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, overrunning the Didube-Chugureti District Court. Mkalavishvili's marauding followers brought wooden and iron crosses, as well as banners with offensive slogans.

Mkalavishvili himself even threatened the lawyers and victims while they were in the courtroom. With police refusing to provide adequate security, lawyers filed a motion asking for court assistance, but the judge ruled the maximum security allowed would be 10 policemen, while no limit was placed on the number of Mkalavishvili's followers permitted in the courtroom. In contrast, the Ministry of Interior has reportedly provided more than 200 police and a SWAT team to protect officials of its office when Mkalavishvili was brought to trial under different charges.

Certainly, the Georgian Government could provide adequate security so that its judicial system is not overruled by vigilante justice. Unfortunately for all Georgians, the anemic government response is indicative of its inability or worse yet, its unwillingness to enforce the law to protect minority religious groups.

As is clearly evident, Georgian authorities are not taking effective steps to deter individuals and groups from employing violence against Jehovah's Witnesses and other minority faiths. With the ineptitude of the justice system now well known, Mkalavishvili has brazenly and publicly warned that the attacks will not cease.

Religious intolerance is one of the most pernicious human rights problems in Georgia today. Therefore, I call upon President Eduard Shevardnadze to take action to end the violence against religious believers, and prevent attacks on minority religious communities. Despite the meetings he held with the various faith communities intended to demonstrate tolerance, Georgian Government inaction is sending a very different message. Tbilisi's pledge to uphold the rights of all believers and prosecute those who persecute the faithful must be followed by action.

As a member of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I urge President Shevardnadze to do whatever is necessary to stop these attacks, and to honor Georgia's OSCE commitments to promote and ensure religious freedom without distinction. The Georgian Government should take concrete steps to punish the perpetrators through vigorous prosecution.●

#### TRIBUTE TO JACK CHURCH

● Mr. JOHNSON. Madam President, for 15 years, Jack Church has worked tirelessly on behalf of the citizens of Butte County as Emergency Management and Veterans' Service Officer. Over the years, Jack has completed and filed applications for disability, education, pension, and other benefits for the nearly 900 veterans living in Butte County. He has also provided assistance to the families of veterans and worked to obtain needed military and medical records, as well as medals and other decorations for veterans.

I have appreciated Jack's work on behalf of veterans over the years. He has

been a great advocate for veterans in South Dakota, not only on issues that impact the individual veteran and his or her family, but also on issues that impact all veterans, such as maintaining access to health care services in the Department of Veterans Affairs. He has always recognized the particular issues affecting veterans who live in rural areas, whose access to VA health care and other services can be limited by distance or income. He has been active on issues such as prescription drug costs for veterans and senior citizens, has advocated concurrent receipt of disability and retiree compensation for military retirees, and worked hard to speed up the processing of claims filed by veterans. He has truly been a friend to the veterans of South Dakota over the years.

In 2000, Butte County veterans received \$1.8 million in Federal benefits, compared to \$900,000 in 1990. This represents Jack's work to ensure the veterans in Butte County get the benefits they deserve. When claims or requests for records or medals were delayed, Jack was not afraid to "rattle the cages" to get the necessary action on behalf of the veteran. At last resort, he would contact my office for assistance in some of these cases. Thanks to his efforts, countless veterans in Butte County and the surrounding region have benefitted from services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs. His comments and insight on veterans issues have helped me over the years in my fight to bring more attention and action on health care, education, and other issues affecting veterans. I commend Jack for his dedication and commitment to forging relationships that have the best interests of the individual veteran in mind.

In addition to his great work with South Dakota veterans, I have appreciated Jack's involvement in other areas in his community. As emergency management officer for Butte County, Jack has helped develop and administer disaster plans for the citizens of Butte County. In times of crisis, Jack was always in the middle of the action, helping to coordinate relief efforts and provide assistance to individuals in time of need. Whether it was finding shelter during an evening storm, or providing food stuffs or even portapotties, Jack has always been dedicated to getting assistance and emergency help to victims. But Jack has also been very proactive, helping to educate the public on the importance of awareness in times of emergencies. Together with other emergency management officials in South Dakota, I was pleased with Jack's efforts to help me promote the need for, and importance of, weather radios to the citizens of South Dakota.

Jack Church richly deserves the thanks of his community. It is an honor for me to share his accomplishments with my colleagues and to publicly commend him for serving South Dakota and our country.●